

Perry Chief
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From Page:
1
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44138



Perry hoping to become bonafide 'Great Place'

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108

With all the work that has been done in and around Perry over the past few years, one word a person could use to describe the city could be "great."

Now, there is a citizens' group hoping to make that designation official. The group, made up of local businessmen and women and other community leaders, will be inviting the state to Perry by July 1. The invitation is for a "coach" from the state to visit Perry and help the city become a charter member of Iowa's "Great Places" initiative.

"Governor (Tom) Vilsack created this initiative because one of his goals is to bolster the small towns in Iowa," said Brian Magruder, one of the committee members. "He set this program up to develop the state's small towns, to make them good places to visit, and to nourish the small town way of life."

Magruder and Kate Durbin spoke to the Perry City Council on Monday night to give the board an update on the committee's progress. The goal, according to Durbin, is to bring Perry more grant opportunities since it will be exposed to more state agencies.

The timeline for the Great Places has all application materials being due to the state this fall. By December, the first three Great Places are scheduled to be named.

Should Perry garner Great Places recognition, a team of state officials

will then be brought in to help the city with any number of projects, Magruder said.

"What we're competing for is an array of different state agencies, that have been strung together to create a buffet of grant packages and financial assistance," explained Magruder.

For example, Perry could have greater access to grants for rehabilitation of certain parks or for continued work with the streetscape of Second Street, Magruder said. Grants might also be available for building owners in the downtown area.

Magruder added that since so much citizen involvement is encouraged in the project, it gives local people a chance to see how city projects are funded and a greater sense of ownership in the community.

"Everybody is invited to participate," Magruder said, adding that strong community participation could serve as a measuring stick of the city's effort in becoming a Great Place.

"If everyone is involved, we hope that it will help the judges realize the investment in Perry is worth it," Magruder stated.

Overall, it is a win-win situation, according to Magruder.

"Even if we don't get selected, we'll get exposure to all these different state agencies and know how to work with them better," he said.

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